Letters and Privileges of

Pope Stephen VI

An English Translation

Letter I

TO ARNUSTUS, ARCHBISHOP OF NARBONNE.

Privilege of the Archbishopric of Narbonne

Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to our most reverend and most holy brother Arnustus, archbishop of the first see of the holy Church of Narbonne, and through you to the venerable Church [of Narbonne] forever.

It is fitting for apostolic governance to assist those strong in holy religion with compassion, and to grant assent with eager devotion to those asking. From this we obtain reward from the Lord, maker of all things, when venerable places, duly ordered, have been brought to a better state.

The reverence of your fraternity has asked that by the privilege of our apostolic authority we should confirm all the immovable possessions of the first see of the Church of Narbonne, built in honour of the saints Justus and Pastor, where the blessed Paul, confessor of Christ, rests in body.

That is, all houses, cells, churches, villages, courts, parishes, lands, vineyards, meadows, woods, and the half of the saltworks, and the toll, or rafica [caravan duty], and shipwreck, the monastery of St Lawrence and the cells, with all their appurtenances and dependencies, together with servants of both sexes, and other things pious emperors and kings and God-fearing men have conferred upon the same holy Church of Narbonne, and are situated in the county of Narbonne itself and in Rhedesium [Razès], or Minerbium [Minervois] and Ausona [Uzès], as well as in Béziers and also in Nîmes.

Inclined by your salutary petitions, we have decreed that from the present day, the fourteenth indiction [A.D. 896], by the privilege of our apostolic confirmation, we strengthen, establish, and forever confirm by our apostolic authority, for the use and benefit of the same holy first Church of Narbonne, which you preside over, all houses, cells, churches, villages, courts, parishes, lands, vineyards, meadows, woods, and the half of the saltworks, and the toll, or rafica [caravan duty], and shipwreck, the monastery of St Lawrence and the cells, with all their appurtenances and dependencies, together with families of both sexes, and all other things pious emperors and kings, or other God-fearing men, have conferred upon the same church or shall confer, both in the county of Narbonne itself and in Rhedesium [Razès], or Minerbium [Minervois], and Ausona [Uzès], as well as in Béziers and also in Nîmes.

We will that all these things be held and possessed by you and your successors with the most firm right, just as they were formerly possessed by your predecessor of holy memory, Bishop Daniel [A.D. c. 769-798], and also the reverend Sigebaud [A.D. 873-885], prelate of the same first see of Narbonne, confirming them in every way under your and your successors' jurisdiction, power, and use.

Establishing by apostolic censure, under the adjuration of divine judgement and the ban of anathema, it shall never be lawful for any great or small man to commit any violence or oppression in all these possessions, or to have any power, or to distrain anyone, or to exact any toll from them, or to summon them anywhere for any causes under their own right, unless in the presence of the archbishop their case is heard and regularly decided.

It has also pleased us by our authority, according to canonical sanction, to add this: if at any time by divine calling you and your successors depart from this life, so long as in that same Church of Narbonne there is found one worthy to carry out the office of its pontificate, it shall not be lawful for anyone from another place to enter there, nor for any person, under whatever dignity or royal authority, to usurp the see; but a gathering of the neighbouring

bishops able and willing to come, without the prohibition of any power, shall confer upon him the dignity of the blessing of the clergy or people.

But if it should happen that one of the suffragan bishops dies, let the metropolitan bishop, seeking the election of the people of that place, take care to visit it as a widowed church. And if perchance there shall not be found there anyone who can bear the burden of the priesthood, by canonical authority and our apostolic permission, let it be lawful for him without any hindrance to enthrone from his own church one who may be worthy to preside as pastor over his suffragan church.

If anyone presumes with rash boldness to act against our apostolic privilege, piously established by us, let him know that he is bound by the chains of anathema and is alienated from the kingdom of God. But whoever shall be a true guardian and observer, let him obtain blessing and grace from the Lord.

Written by the hand of Nicolaus, scriniarius [archivist] of the holy Roman Church, in the month of August, in the fourteenth indiction [A.D. 896]. Farewell.

Given on the thirteenth day before the Kalends of September [20th August], by the hand of Stephen, bishop of the holy Church of Nepi, treasurer of the holy Church of the Apostolic See, when our most pious lord Augustus Arnulf, crowned by God, the great emperor, was reigning in the first year [A.D. 896].

Letter II[1]

TO ARIBERT, ARCHBISHOP OF NARBONNE

[1] Incorrectly attributed to Stephen VI by Migne. Aribert was not Archbishop of Narbonne at the time of Pope Stephen VI (896-897).

It is complained that power has been given to the Jews to possess allodial lands.

Stephen, pope, to Aribert, archbishop of Narbonne, and to all the powerful men of Septimania and Spain, greeting.

It is fitting for us, who have received in apostolic succession the key of the heavenly granary, to extend a remedy to every pestilence of the flock of divine faith. If we cannot give measures of wheat, yet at least we may be able to bestow a sextarius.

We were touched with sorrow, distressed even unto death, when we learned through you that the Jewish people, always rebellious to God and derogating from our ceremonies, hold allodial inheritances in villages and suburbs within the boundaries and territories of Christians, as though they were Christian inhabitants, by certain precepts of the kings of the Franks. Because those enemies of the Lord have dangerously obtained these things, and Christian men cultivate their vineyards and fields, within cities and without, Christian males and females, dwelling with these transgressors, are stained day and night with words of blasphemy, and wretched men and women unceasingly render to the aforesaid dogs all services which can be said or imagined. The promises to the fathers of the Hebrews, made by their chosen lawgiver Moses and his successor Joshua, were concluded and bounded by these borders, sworn and delivered by the Lord himself, and have deservedly been taken away from these unbelievers and their wicked fathers as vengeance of the crucified Saviour.

And truly the teacher of the Church [St Paul] signifies to the orthodox flocks, saying: “What fellowship has light with darkness? What concord has Christ with Belial? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor. 6). And the supreme counsellor of the Word [John the Apostle] admonishes, saying: “If anyone says to him ‘Hail’ …” (2 John 11), *et cetera*.

The rest is lacking.

Letter III

Privilege for the Monastery of Vézelay

Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to Eudo, the venerable abbot of the monastery of Vézelay, and to the whole congregation of the same monastery forever.

Whenever things are sought from us which agree with reason, we ought freely to grant them and to impart fitting support to the desires of those asking.

You have requested that we should grant a privilege of the Apostolic See to the monastery of Vézelay, which you preside over, which was formerly built by Gerard, a most noble and most Christian man, and also by Berta his wife, in honour of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and in veneration of the most blessed ever-virgin Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the kingdom of Burgundy, in the district of Avallon, and which by the aforesaid founders was bestowed upon blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, with pious devotion and by a deed of testament.

Inclined by your prayers we have freely decreed, confirming and ordaining by the privilege of the Apostolic See, that it be unlawful for kings, bishops, counts, or any other person, to disturb the same monastery, or to diminish or take away, or to apply to their own uses, under any pretext of cause or occasion, those things the founders or other faithful offered there, or shall offer in the future. They be held without disturbance for the support of the same monastery and for the use of the abbots and monks serving God under the rule of the holy Father Benedict.

Under this condition, none of our successors, pontiffs in this holy see, serving God as author, shall ever allow anything from these possessions to be granted as a benefice to anyone, or exchanged, or conceded under any rent for future times; but only the rent assigned in the deed of gift by the monastic founders to the holy Roman Church – namely, one pound of silver each year. Our successors, on receiving it, by the support of paternal care, may diligently bestow pastoral solicitude for the monastery against all assailants.

We also ordain that, on the death of the abbot of the aforesaid monastery, no other be ordained there by any craft of deception, except one whom the agreement of the monks, according to the fear of God and the institution of the Rule of St Benedict, shall have elected, and whom the pontiff of this Apostolic See shall foresee ordained, or shall have consented to be ordained at the suggestion of the monks.

We also add to this present chapter that we may exclude the occasion of avarice. No king, no bishops or priests, nor of any of the faithful, either personally or through a subordinate, shall dare, under any appearance of a gift, receive anything concerning the ordination of the same abbot or of clerics or priests, or concerning the gift of chrism, or the consecration of a church, or concerning any causes pertaining to the monastery. Nor shall the abbot presume to give anything for his ordination, lest on this account the things offered by the faithful to a pious place be consumed.

Nor shall the bishop of the city of that parish, unless invited by the abbot of that monastery, celebrate public masses there, nor announce stations in the same monastery, lest the rest of the servants of God in any way be disturbed by a popular gathering. Nor shall he presume to exact prepared provisions or lodging-fees from it.

But the reception of the faithful and religious men and beneficence, which the Apostle [Paul] commands to be shown to all according to the possibility of the place and means, we do not forbid, but even encourage. Also, the number in the congregation shall be so

maintained that neither a multitude may bring scarcity, nor too few inhabitants cause the abandonment of the place.

We also confirm by our authority the privilege granted to the monastery by our predecessor of pious memory Pope Nicholas [I], except that he assigned it under the name of the handmaids of God – who now, on account of frequent disturbances of the world, cannot suitably remain there. For the sake of more fitting usefulness, we determine that it should rightly be under the habit of monks.

But let any kings, bishops, priests, abbots, judges, counts, or secular persons who go against this page of our institution, be struck with apostolic anathema. Let him lack the dignity of his power or honour, and let him know himself guilty before the divine judgement. Unless he laments his wrongdoing, let him be alienated from the most holy body of our Lord Jesus Christ and be subjected to the eternal judgement of strict vengeance.

But to all who justly observe this privilege, let there be peace from our Lord Jesus Christ, that they may receive the fruit of good action, and before the just Judge they may find the rewards of eternal peace.

Written by the hand of Samuel, notary and scriniarius [archivist] of the holy Roman Church, in the month of January, in the 15th indiction [A.D. 897].

Given on the 10th day before the Kalends of February [23rd January], by the hand of Samuel, notary and scriniarius of the holy Roman Church, when our lord Lambert, most pious Augustus, crowned by God, the great emperor, was reigning, indiction 15 [A.D. 897].

Letter IV[2]

[2] This letter is ascribed by Harald Zimmermann's *Papsturkunden* to Stephen VI, hence its inclusion. Traditionally it was ascribed to Stephen VII (929-931).

Privilege for the Monasteries of Psalmody and Joncels.

Stephen, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to Witard,[3] religious presbyter and abbot of the monastery of St Peter of Psalmody and of the Joncels monastery (Psalmody built on the island itself, and Joncels situated in the territory of Béziers, at the castle Lunate), and to the churches of St Mary and St Peter, of the apostle John, of Pope Marcellus and of the martyr Victor, and through you to the same venerable monasteries.

The summit of the highest apostolic dignity is recognised to shine forth in the brilliance of divine foresight, so that in exercising praises to God it will strive to exhibit zeal in its labours. For this reason, apostolic pastoral solicitude compels us to promulgate, and by the censure of apostolic institution to confirm, whatever pertains to the stability of pious places.

You have asked of us that the monasteries of St Peter and of the other saints, situated on the island of Psalmody, and also the cell built [in veneration] of the martyr Julian, which they call Cornilianicus, and another cell, and all things which belong to the monastery itself of Nîmes and Uzès, and also of Béziers, where the Joncels monastery is constructed near the castle Lunate, cells and villages and farmsteads, be adorned with the privileges of the Apostolic See. Under the jurisdiction of our dearest [authority], just as you have received the commands of emperors or of kings, confirmed from their hand and pressed with seals, for the remedy of their souls, so also we establish for you by privilege, to which by God as author we minister. The constitution of the church shall be subjected to the jurisdiction of no other church.

[3] Psalmody Abbey had an Abbot Witard during the papacy of Stephen VI, which helps Zimmermann's argument. It is unknown if there was an Abbot Witard during the papacy of Stephen VII.

On account of which, favouring pious desires, by our authority we deliver into effect that which is demanded.

And therefore we forbid by this authority every priest of whatever church to have any jurisdiction in the aforesaid monasteries, except for the Apostolic See. Unless he is invited by the abbot of the monastery, no one at all may presume in any way to celebrate there the solemnity of masses.

Moreover, establishing by apostolic censure under the invocation of divine judgement, and by strong and most severe interdictions of anathema, no one else may presume – whatever dignity he may be endowed with, whatever power, great or small – to impose himself upon the monastery or its causes or possessions, or upon the goods or places or anything that pertains to the monastery, in such a way as to take away or alienate them. Nor to inflict any kind of malice or injury, whether in time of peace or of barbarism. Indeed we decree that the monastery, as has been said, in both time of peace and time of barbarism, is to remain by firm stability under the jurisdiction of our dearest Church. Regarding the kingdom and emperors under whose authority it is to be ruled or governed, we establish that, whenever the reign, the monastery shall fall under our authority in all things.

For we proclaim and establish by the authority of the blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, before God and His dreadful future judgement, through the constitution of our apostolic privilege. The places which the abbots of the aforesaid monasteries of Saints Peter, Victor, Marcellus, Saturninus and Felix the martyr, in Psalmody or in Joncels, situated in the county of Nîmes and of Béziers, have acquired through exchange or been granted, and likewise the other possessions of places which kings or dukes or viscounts and other Christians have bestowed and offered, or shall in future grant, are to exist with firm stability by right to the aforesaid monasteries, and to remain in perpetuity.

Nor is it permitted, as has been said, that from these monasteries or from all things belonging to the same monasteries, anything be taken away by any person, great or small. That which is subject to the venerable places hereby constituted apostolic and privileged, and also consisting together with kings, shall remain immovably endowed.

But if anyone (which we do not desire) shall presume with nefarious daring to oppose that which has been established by us for the praise of God, for the stability of the aforesaid monasteries, and to transgress them in any way, let him know himself bound by the chain of anathema. With the devil and his most atrocious pomps and with Judas, the betrayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, we appoint him to be burned in the punishment of eternal fire.

But truly, whoever from pious intention shall have been observant, and in all things a guardian of our apostolic constitution, looking towards the worship of God, may he obtain manifoldly the grace of blessing from our most merciful Lord God, and merit to be a participant of eternal life.